

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Swick Creek Prescribed fire, DOI-BLM-ORWA-P000-2016-0006-DNA  
US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management  
Prineville Field Office, Oregon

### **Introduction**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has adopted the Damon Wildland Urban Interface Project Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes the effects of prescribed fire. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) incorporates the EA for the Damon Wildland Urban Interface project, by reference.

The United States Forest Service, Malheur National Forest is currently implementing Alternative 2 of the Damon Wildland Urban Interface Project Environmental Assessment to reduce fire hazard through the use of underburning, precommercial and commercial thinning, fuel disposal and biomass removal, and aspen restoration in the 19,421 acre Damon Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Project Area on the Blue Mountain Ranger District. All activities are planned under the authority of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). The project area is a forested, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Area identified in the Grant County Community Fire Protection Plan. The plan was approved in June and July of 2005 and updated in 2009. The management objectives are to enhance fire suppression capabilities by modifying fire behavior inside the interface zone and providing a safe and effective area for fire suppression activities.

The BLM is proposing to allow prescribed burning on an isolated 160 acre block of BLM managed public land within the Forest Service project area. Burning the BLM parcel in conjunction with the larger Forest Service project would reduce the need for constructed fire lines by enabling the burning to occur "road to road." Burning the BLM parcel would accomplish the same objectives as those described in the Damon EA, including reducing fire hazard through fuel reduction, improving vegetative condition, improving habitat for a variety of wildlife species, and minimizing losses to commercial tree species.

Since the 160 acre parcel was not specifically included in the EA, the BLM completed a Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) to document its rationale for why a) the action was essentially the same as those included in the existing analysis, b) the range of alternatives considered in the EA was appropriate given the new proposed action, c) the existing analysis is still valid since no new information or circumstances exist, d) effects from the new proposed action would be the same as those already considered in the EA, and e) the public involvement already conducted is adequate.

The Swick Creek Prescribed Fire FONSI and DNA (DOI-BLM-ORWA-P000-2016-0006-DNA) and the Damon EA are available on the BLM's ePlanning web site at: [https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa\\_register.do](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do).

## **Determination**

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations state that the significance of impacts must be determined in terms of both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27). If the proposed action is found to have significant effects as defined by CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.27) the BLM would need to create an Environmental Impact Statement before signing a decision.

## **Context**

I have considered the potential context and scale of the impacts from the anticipated implementation of a decision on the EA and found that the effects are limited in context. The effects of the actions are limited because the proposed action is to allow the Malheur National Forest to use prescribed fire on 160 acres of forested BLM managed public land concurrently with prescribed fire the Malheur National Forest intends to conduct on 13,725 acres in the same general area.

## **Intensity**

I have considered the potential intensity and severity of the impacts anticipated from implementation of a Decision on this EA relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

### **1. Would any of the alternatives have significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)? No.**

**Rationale:** Beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the Selected Alternative have been fully considered within the EA. Beneficial and adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed within the appropriate context and intensity. I find my decision would have neither a significant beneficial or adverse impact because the anticipated effects are similar to those in past fuel reduction projects which have not proven to cause significant impacts. Effects are described in the following EA locations in Chapter 3: Fuels (pages 4-33); Forest Vegetation (pages 34-65); Aspen (pages 66-72); Wildlife (pages 73-160); Soils (pages 160-172); Hydrology (pages 173-183); Fisheries (pages 184-206); Rangeland Resources and Noxious Weeds (pages 207-219); Botany (pages 220-234); Recreation (pages 235-242); Visual Quality (pages 243-250); Socio-Economic (pages 251-261); Heritage (pages 262-269); and Findings and Disclosures (pages 270-276).

- 2. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on public health and safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)? No.**

**Rationale:** There are limited health and safety hazards to the general public, adjacent landowners, permittees, and Forest Service Employees. Smoke management guidelines will be followed (EA Chapter 2, pages 30-33; and Chapter 3, 275). The Selected Alternative would not significantly affect public health or safety. The safety of the area will be improved for adjacent landowners and fire fighters (EA Chapter 1, page 3-4; Chapter 3, pages 24-30). None of the streams in the project area are on the Oregon 303(d) list for water quality-limited water bodies, although several of the named and unnamed streams are tributaries to streams included on the List for a variety of parameters.

- 3. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on unique geographic characteristics (cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, or ecologically critical areas (ACECs, RNAs, significant caves)) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)? No.**

**Rationale:** There are no prime farmlands, rangelands, National Landmarks, municipal watersheds, Research Natural Areas or wild and scenic rivers within the project area. The project is consistent with the Clean Water Act, Executive Orders addressing floodplains and wetlands, other applicable laws and related regulations and with the Forest Plan, as amended, because it would not measurably increase watershed impacts over the existing condition (EA Chapter 3, pages 273-276).

- 4. Would any of the alternatives have highly controversial effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)? No.**

**Rationale:** My decision falls within the scope of the analysis for the John Day Basin Resource Management Plan (2015). During collaboration and other correspondence with the public there was no information presented that indicates substantial controversy about the effects of the project. CEQ guidelines on controversy refer not to the amount of public opposition, but to a substantial dispute to the size, nature, and effect of the action.

- 5. Would any of the alternatives have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)? No.**

**Rationale:** My decision does not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks and is based on best available science and extensive experience with similar types of actions. The activities proposed are well established land management practices, and the risks are well known and understood. Would any of the alternatives establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)? No.

- 6. Are any of the alternatives related to other actions with potentially significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)? No.**

**Rationale:** My decision will not establish a precedent for future action with significant effects because this action is not unusual in itself and does not lead to a future action that is

unique. The Swick Old Growth forest plan amendment applies only to identify the white-headed woodpecker habitat management objective instead of the pileated woodpecker habitat management objective and the removal of wood product to reduce fuel loads. This is not a significant effect on pileated woodpecker habitat because analysis found that approximately 21% of the project area would be maintained as primary or secondary habitat for pileated woodpecker, and would meet direction in the Forest Plan, increasing Old Forest Multi-Strata habitat for associated wildlife species such as pileated woodpecker in the mid to long-term (EA Chapter 3, page 103). The analysis also found that the Swick Old growth stand is more ecologically suitable as white-headed woodpecker habitat. The forest plan amendment to convert old forest multi-strata to single-stratum structure will require future maintenance burning or treatment to maintain this structure. Future treatments would include additional analysis to determine HRV stand structural needs in the area.

- 7. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)? No.**

**Rationale:** The Selected Alternative is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulative significant impacts. The analysis of past actions follows the Council on Environmental Quality guidance provided on June 24, 2005 and is consistent with Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (36CFR 220.4(f)) (July 24, 2008). Appendix C in the EA displays all activities and natural events that already have occurred, are currently occurring, or are likely to occur in the area of potential cumulative effects. The applicable information in Appendix C is incorporated in cumulative effects analysis identified in the EA in chapter 3.

- 8. Would any of the alternatives have significant adverse impacts on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)? No.**

**Rationale:** My decision will not adversely affect any scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The proposed action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act. With the completion of the Heritage inventory under the terms of the 2004 Programmatic Agreement with Oregon State Preservation Officer, and by providing the interdisciplinary team with appropriate input as per NEPA, all relevant laws and regulations have been met. There would be no effect to any historic property listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP) since all known sites, eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP, would be avoided (EA Chapter 3, pages 274-275).

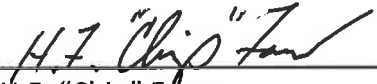
- 9. Would any of the alternatives have effects that threaten to violate federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)? No.**

**Rationale:** Actions are not likely to significantly adversely affect any threatened or endangered wildlife, aquatic, or plant species (EA Chapter 3, pages 272-273). Biological

evaluations were completed for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species of animals, fish, and plants. These are available in the Project Record.

### **Finding**

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, the consideration of intensity factors described above, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) the alternatives are in conformance with the John Day Basin Resource Management Plan; and (2) neither alternative would constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS or a supplement to the existing EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

  
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H.F. "Chip" Faver

Field Manager, Central Oregon Resource Area

5.23.16  
Date